

Quality, Quality, Quality... We need your help!

During this filing season 51 sites have been “shopped”. **The results thus far indicate that 50% of the returns completed for TIGTA shoppers and 64% of the returns completed for IRS shoppers were prepared correctly.**

We are extremely grateful for the wonderful job being done by the majority of our sites and volunteers. Many sites that were visited have quality processes in place and taxpayers are receiving the highest quality service available.

This accuracy level, however, is far from the quality that all taxpayers expect and deserve. **An incorrect tax return can have a significant impact on a taxpayer** and possibly subject them to compliance action (e.g., notices, audits, frozen refunds, adjustments to refunds, disallowed EITC, etc.) resulting in an undue burden and hardship to the taxpayer.

In some locations two of the most critical quality processes were missing - the intake and interview process and the quality review process.

Here are examples from Shopping visits when no process was used:

1. Posing as a taxpayer, the shopper completed the first page of the Form 13614. The volunteer completed the second page of the Form 13614 without asking the shopper any questions, and then prepared the return. Quality review of the return was not conducted. **Errors included:**
 - a. **Omission of interest income**
 - b. **Omission of Child and Dependent Care Credit**
 - c. **Incorrect Earned Income Tax Credit amount**

2. In another scenario, the shopper completed Form 13614 and indicated that her children lived in her home for less than 6 months. The volunteer did not use the information on Form 13614 to prepare the return, nor ask the shopper probing questions to determine the proper deduction. **The errors made on the return resulted in the shopper receiving an erroneous refund of \$5609.** Again, a quality review of the return was not conducted.
NOTE: If this had been a real taxpayer who was later audited, the tax debt plus interest and penalties would have been so large, it would have taken the taxpayer years to repay the money!

In both cases described above a quality review process was not in place. A second set of eyes has proven to be critical in preparing correct returns. **The shopper’s experiences have captured the importance of utilizing all of the quality tools and processes for every return prepared.** At sites where there was a designated reviewer many of the potential errors were caught and corrected while the taxpayer (shopper) was still at the site, thus preventing an incorrect return from being prepared.

Here's what you must do...

Ensure that you use the quality processes outlined in the Minimum Quality Site Requirements. With few exceptions, returns were prepared incorrectly because a volunteer did not use the quality tools or follow the quality process.

The following Intake and Interview Process is a requirement for every return:

- An interview with the taxpayer.
- Use of IRS Form 13614, Intake and Interview Sheet, or a partner-developed form asking the same questions (or similar questions that ask for the same information.)
- Confirmation of the taxpayer's responses on the Intake and Interview form.
- Use of Publication 4012 or Publication 17 to ask probing questions to ensure complete information is gathered.
- Review of all supporting documentation, W-2's, 1099's, and other.
- Request for missing or incomplete documentation, if applicable.

The following Quality Review Process is a requirement for every return prepared:

- The taxpayer should participate in the quality review process
- The quality reviewer is required to use one of the following checklists:
 - Form 8158, Quality Review Checklist
 - Publication 730, Important Tax Records (envelope)
 - Publication 4012, Volunteer Resource Guide
 - Publication 3189, Volunteer e-file Administrator Guide or
 - Locally developed checklist that contains the same information.
- The quality reviewer is required to use the available source documents to confirm identity, income, expenses and credits on the return.
- If applicable, the reviewer should refer to Publication 4012 and/or Publication 17

The Quality processes must be in place and properly applied to ensure every taxpayer receiving service at a volunteer return preparation site has an accurate return prepared. Shortcuts are not acceptable. A Quality review of each return must be conducted, without exception.

In order for the volunteer tax preparation program to continue to be recognized for the quality service that is provided to communities across the country, we must remain focused on adherence to the processes that lead to accurate returns.

Thank you for your continued support and your efforts to increase the quality of returns prepared at volunteer tax assistance sites!